



**Public Affairs Section
United States Embassy Nairobi**

A story, a story, it's time for a story/Sheekoy, sheeko, sheeko xariira... Somali-English Family Literacy Story Hour at Youth Summit in Northeastern Kenya



Although promotion of the joy of reading and literacy is a main focus of the Library of Congress, it is not usually considered part of the mission for the Library's overseas offices. However, recently the Nairobi Office director, Pamela Howard-Reguindin had the opportunity to share her joy of reading with the younger set by participating in a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) "youth summit" program in Garissa, Kenya, not far from the Somali border. Designed to reach out to Muslim youth in northeastern Kenya, many of whom are of Somali origin, the summit meeting gave the youths "space" to let their voices be heard while describing AID and non-government organization programs they are working on. The impetus for the field director's participation in this summit grew out of the National Book Festival which she attended last September after a field directors' meeting. While perusing the Pavilion of the States she happened upon the Minnesota stand where she espied bilingual books in Somali and English published by the Minnesota Humanities Center for Somali immigrants to that state. Knowing that these folktales would be useful learning tools for Somali immigrants to Kenya, she inquired about availability and eventually received 600 copies of two folktales to share with Somali-Kenyans: *The travels of Igal Shidad/Safarada Cigaal Shidaad* and *Wiil Waal*. The goal of the Minnesota Humanities Center is to get the books into the hands and homes of Somali immigrants so that parents and children can read together to improve English skills while maintaining Somali language skills and culture.

Finding the right venue to do this in Kenya took some time and when the USAID Garissa Youth Summit was planned, it seemed like a perfect match. The field director asked USAID if she could do a story hour using the folktale books at the Kenya National Library Garissa branch and was delighted with a positive response. She advised that about 20 parent/child pairs would be an ideal number to work with but, the local officials thought otherwise and invited some 200 kids aged 5-14 from five schools! Surrounded by the children sitting on colorful floor mats and a few tables and chairs, Pamela gave a brief introduction about using the library frequently and the value and joy of reading and literacy. Then she and the younger children took turns reading the English pages of the books aloud while several Somali-Kenyan teenage boys and girls read the Somali pages aloud. A lively discussion ensued about the themes of the

two tales and everyone was happy to leave with books for their homes to share with their families. Several dozen Library of Congress bookmarks and 2009 National Book Festival posters were provided to the school officials present to use as prizes for their best students. After the event, Pamela was interviewed by a K24 TV news journalist who aired the interview on national television a few days later.

And she even found a small Somali/Swahili lexicon in the one local bookstore that LOC didn't have! You just never know where you'll find interesting publications to acquire!

Submitted by Pamela Howard-Reguindin, Field Director, LOC/Nairobi Office.



Photo by Dwaine Lee

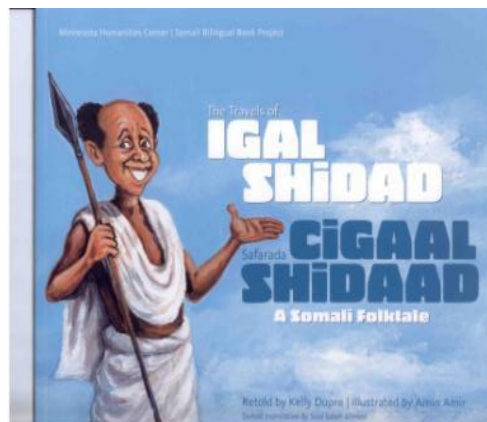
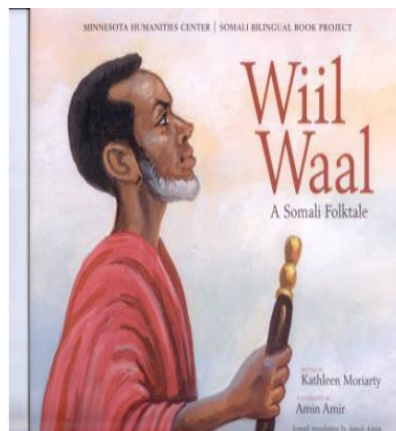




Photo by Nancy Meaker



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